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ABSTRACT

This personal essay highlights a disturbing trend in the increasing divorce rates not only in Nigerian society, but also across the entire globe. The paper notes many cultural differences between how Nigerian society and the Western world perceive divorce, emphasizing that, worldwide, children are always the victims. Of particular concern is the impact that this trend is having on the welfare of children in these broken families. Children of broken families are susceptible to a range of developmental issues that will require careful monitoring and perhaps intervention. The essay recommends counseling as a method of helping family members cope with whatever changes the dissolution of a marriage will bring. (GCP)

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EFFECT OF FAMILY DISSOLUTION, SEPARATION AND DISORGANISATION ON CHILDREN, PARTNER AND THE SOCIETY

By: Prince P.G. Olatunji

INTRODUCTION:

Family Dissolution, separation and disorganisation may sometimes be interchangeably used while "Divorce" may equally be, vice versa adopted.

Ordinarily define: Divorce or Family Dissolution pre supposes a sort of legal termination of a marriage between a couple. The whole spectrum of the economic tension has cut across the Nigerian society and lately, there are indications that the doctrine of "USED ONCE AND DISCARD OR OUT-OF-USE" is spreading like wildfire, even to human relationships worldwide.

A decision to "Divorce" a partner is a great risk whether it is initiated by the wife or the husband. They must ask themselves those important questions about why it must be done, why take this step? Is the situation so bad that the marriage cannot be saved; have we tried everything to make the marriage work? How will this affect the children and our families? In the case of the woman, she must ask herself how she will support herself financially if she is dependent on the husband for money.

RATES OF FAMILY DISSOLUTION AND DISORGANISATION

We now witness a situation where the snowballing divorce rates or family separation are becoming a global problem. For instance, as at 1983, there were 2, 444, 000 marriages with 1, 179, 000 divorces or family separation. Approximately, it implies more than one Divorce in two in that country.

In the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic (U.S.S.R.) there were 2,834, 000 marriages with 946, 000 ending in 'separation' or 'dissolution' meaning Divorce in three marriages.

In Australia, they had 113, 905 marriages as at 1982, with 41, 412 ending in 'separation' also implying one Divorce in three marriages.

Cuba recorded 76, 365 marriages in 1983, with 29, 249 of the total ending in 'Dissolution' implying two divorce cases in five marriages.

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In the Netherlands, the statistics stood at 78, 415 marriages, 32, 596 Divorces, the ratio two to five.

In Great Britain, the statistics stood at 387, 000 marriages and 145, 802 'separation' in 1982.

Hungary recorded as at 1983, 75, 978 marriages with 29, 000 of the total ending in 'Dissolution',

In Denmark, they recorded 27, 096 marriages with 29,000 of the total ending in 'Separation', while in Sweden the statistics is 36, 210 marriages with 20, 618 ending in 'Dissolution', implying that with the daily reports of 'Family Dissolution', rates country-wide, the statistics could be staggering, perhaps as much as that of the United States of America.

These sensational figures don't mean that the world is turning its back on marriages per se, but what it definitely implied is that the philosophy of "Disposability" has spread into the marriage Chess game- that more men and women are willing to consign their spouses to the same fate as the Coca-Cola can nothing more.

CAUSES OF FAMILY DISSOLUTION, SEPARATION AND DISORGANISATION

Experts have enumerated the causes of the snow-balling separation of dissolution (Divorce) rates, but we all know that apart from anything else, when people go into marriage with unrealistic expectations and horrible experiences, they are under considerable strains and stress which would inevitably and in the family collapse- which is catastrophic.

Causes of dissolution or separation however depend on individual couples' perception of what the marriage institution stands to offer them. A great myth and convention that surrounds our culture is that marriage is the be- all and end-all of everything. The sum total but on the contrary, marriage simply exchanges old problems for new challenges.

The only possible gain perhaps, is a chance for a lasting marriage has intangible gratification that defies description.

In compatibility has played a leading role in 'Dissolution' or 'Divorce' rate. Some marriages are disasters from the beginning, so as such that the only thing more destructive than getting a divorce is not getting a divorce.

But couples, who go into marriage with their eyes half closed and their expectations wide open, soon discover, to their dismay, that marriage is not the bed of roses as anticipated after all and they consequently turn round to say they are incompatible.

Equality in marriage is a superb theory but difficult to translate into reality. Too many men, rather than accept the logical partnership that can evolve in marriage, seek to establish an impossible masculine ideal. In the process, to compensate for what they perceive to be personal shortcomings, they become domineering, supercilious of the male chauvinist.

Dissolution, in a common sense, is like a shoot-out between Siamese twins. No matter what happens both parties become casualties. The same couple, who has once clung together in the middle of the night suddenly, turns into their marriage to death. When the whole thing boomerangs, what happens? Who benefit from their separation after all the wife, the husband, and the offspring?

IMPLICATION ON CHILDREN, PARTNER AND SOCIETY.

For children, a broken home may lead to feeling of insecurity that continues throughout his childhood and adolescence. The parent with whom he stays may try to turn the child against the other so he is uncertain about how he is supposed to feel about the other parent. It is important to remember however, that parental quarreling, nagging and general tension between the parents living together in the home also creates a feeling of tension in the growing child. Disagreement is a natural part of adjusting to a marriage and at times an emotional release or occasional argument can 'clear the air', so to speak.

But when a child sees that his own parents seem to settle disagreements by arguing and fighting all the time, then that may be the way he decides to settle all his disagreements with others, by fighting it out rather than reasoning.

This has implications for the society he lives in and the possible development of criminal tendencies among our youth. No child is born a criminal, he learns feeling like hostility from those that he relates to, from the beginning of his life, his parents are his main teachers and what they do, he will copy or imitate.

When the child becomes old enough to begin his own family, this kind of behaviour may repeat itself in his relationship with his own wife and thus the cycle continues. Now,

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what can his parents tell him about treating his partner better if he has grown up seeing this type of behaviours in his own parents' home?

So, it is important for us to remember that a good happy home does not just happen out of the air. Understanding and cooperation, sharing interest, helpfulness and worshipping together make them. These elements strengthen each other. In such marriages, dissolution does not even present itself as an option.

'Dissolution', 'separation', or 'Divorce' means that a marriage has failed and because nobody likes failure, each partner seeks to blame the other. The wife may say the husband drinks too much and is abusive towards her. In turn, he says he drinks because his wife is nagging him and is too quarrelsome. Each point the finger at the others own faults. Most Divorce cases however are difficult to unravel or understand.

In any case with the present state of things, the impact of dissolution or divorce seems greater for the woman. The man dominates in the family as well as in the society in general and his preferences are likely to receive first consideration particularly in cases of child custody, of course there are exceptions but the woman should at least be prepared to accept this fact.

The situation alone will present emotional conflict, anxiety about the child's welfare and disturbed family relationships. In addition, the idea of "being on Her own" and supporting herself financially, may be a frightening one if she is dependent on her husband's income. These two factors; child custody and economic dependence are responsible for many unhappy marriages continuing, but it is not good to feel trapped in an unhappy marriage that will go on for life as if the person has been sent to prison.

Dissolution of family or Divorce is an ill wind that blows no one any good. Its consequences are great, numerous and varied. In this part of the world, there is nothing like mortgage or alimony entrenched in the country's constitution for the wife excepts when the courts make discretional measures or orders. In most cases, unlike in some industrialised nations, the amount is just a peanut. In the United States of America and Britain, for instance, the woman benefits more from the dissolution, separation or divorce than the man. In Britain, especially the man stands the risk of loosing his property or materials wealth including his house to his wife.

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If the man is 'stinkingly' rich, the woman stands the chance of milking him via claims. But in Nigeria, as it obtainable in some other African Countries, the process is difficult and the result is not satisfying at least.

But apart from the financial booties, gains and losses, each consenting partner to the Dissolution or 'separation' stand the greater risk of living 'solitary life, especially couples who had became well accustomed to living within marriage for a longtime. 'Separation' or 'dissolution' of family could sound easy in theory, but in reality, it is just something else with many implications and consequences. Apart from anything else, there are the children who are forever inquisitive to cope with whosoever keeps the custody of the children.

In Nigeria, unlike Britain, it is the man who is given the custody of the children, except those underage. Given this development, how would a man who hitherto never went through any form of child-care training come round to understand the many complications of childcare? Defining their moods apart from the constant crave for motherly attention?

CONCLUSION AND GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Some efforts must be made to make the marriage a meaningful one. The couple must seek help from somewhere, whether it be their Church, Mosque, the family, or counselling services. The Husband and Wife must seriously review their relationship with each other and come up with some honest answers about what they are doing to each other's life and why their marriage has become so unbearable that one or both of them want to get out of it.

No society encourages or agitates Family Dissolution, although some condone it or accept it more than others. In such societies there are institutional or social structures that are established to address some of the problems of women such as: job-training programme and low-cost day-care centres for working mothers. These have come about as a result of recognition that rapid social change and an urban industrialised society present a complicated set of needs and services that the traditional family has not been able to comprehend much less to do anything about them.

Investigations have revealed that there are many divorced couples, who suffer untold hardship accruing from their separation, ranging from emotional to psychological, even to financial problems. They face the stark reality as soon as the Dissolution is through. Even

those who profess to be their friends dramatically desert them. For the women, they derive the consolation from the belief that another man would come along, but to their disappointment and dismay, the man would never fit in.

Apart from possible rejection by their new stepfather, or mother, the offspring of the broken marriage experience a deep sense of insecurity and confusion.

Yet, it is still the crucial role of the family to meet the needs of the individual and to determine the satisfaction he finds in living not only during childhood but throughout the life span.

Any method designed to help the family understand and cope with changing rules and values can only be supplemental to those of the nuclear and extended family structures.

Many of the people are grooping about, bewildered and bitter, trying to find satisfying, fulfilling lives. Despite materials possessions and comforts, they fail to find satisfaction with their lives and adjust to the challenges and opportunities that life offers.

For those who find themselves in unhappy marriages, Dissolution or separation may be or may not an answer. It may produce another set of problems that are just as difficult to handle. So, in the final analysis, nobody benefits from 'Dissolution', 'Divorce', 'Separation', and 'Disorganization' in the family.

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